Jersey's Legal Pandemonium

September 2018 turned to out to be a "mensis horribilis" for us lawyers.

This should not be the case. September is the commencement of the new legal year. Advocates renew their oaths of office and all practitioners look forward to a fresh start. A bit of Spring in Autumn.

Not this year. Our legal year started with front page headlines: "*Lawyers on strike*". I mean... seriously! When did Advocate Che Guevara land on Jersey's shores?

Of course, there was the inevitable "slagging off" of lawyers. I have no doubt that the very trolls commented upon by the Bailiff in his speech at the Assise d'Héritage emerged from under their purulent bridges. Our lonely keyboard warriors sitting in their dark rooms will have been spanking the keyboard in a frenzy **salivating** at the opportunity to "slag off" lawyers.

However, it is the story behind the headline that caused me to think that I was stuck in some macabre Jersey version of Groundhog Day. Why do I say this? 4 words: "Access to Justice Review". The most absurd title to a review that I have ever come across. Regular readers of the column will be aware of this nonsense. The Access to Justice Review was lodged au Greffe on 2 December 2013. Part of its remit was to undertake a review of legal aid, blah blah blah.

How ironic is it that in the modern Jersey legal world, where the expedient and efficient dispensing of justice is now the cornerstone of the legal landscape, our law makers cannot conclude a review within 5 years. Embarrassing is not the word.

I had understood that this was a done deal given the fact that a draft law was published in February 2018. This however was pulled and now we have a further inexplicable delay conducted by people who have no idea about the legal profession. I love democracy.

As the Jersey Law Society recently reminded the Scrutiny Panel (currently scrutinising the matter), Jersey is the only jurisdiction in the world where the cost of legal aid, estimated at between £7-9 million, is largely borne by the legal profession rather than the State. In 2018, why should this remain the case?

Lawyers remain more than willing to give their time to assist the more vulnerable members of society. This should be applauded, not subject to derision, uneducated commentary and general moronic abuse. It is a nonsense.

Perhaps we should ask others such as accountants, estate agents, vets, engineers and so on to devote £7-9 million of free professional services to vulnerable members of society (as a legal requirement). Mmmm... I wonder what they would say?

Please can we stop this nonsense so everyone can move forward and legal aid can continue to be made available to those in greatest need?

Phil Connors in the film Groundhog Day said: "*When Chekov saw the long winter, he saw a winter bleak and dark and bereft of hope*". I now know how the poor bugger felt.